



Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney James R. Klindt
Middle District of Florida

Tampa

Orlando

Jacksonville

Fort Myers

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CONTACT: STEVE COLE

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PHONE: (813) 274-6136

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/flm/pr>

FAX: (813) 274-6300

PLYMOUTH MAN SENTENCED TO 57 MONTHS FOR FEMA FRAUD

Orlando, Florida - U.S. District Judge John Antoon, II today sentenced PRESTON ANGELO WILLIAMS, 39, of Plymouth, Florida to fifty seven (57) months' imprisonment and ordered him to pay restitution of \$41,216 to the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") for his involvement in FEMA fraud for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The sentence also calls for WILLIAMS to serve three years of supervised release and pay \$500 in special assessments.

WILLIAMS was indicted on May 24, 2006. On July 24, 2006, WILLIAMS pled guilty to one count of conspiracy and four counts of theft of government property. According to court documents, WILLIAMS submitted false applications to FEMA for disaster assistance for Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. In those applications, WILLIAMS falsely represented that he had been a resident of Louisiana at the time of Hurricane Katrina and Texas at the time of Hurricane Rita and that he was eligible for disaster assistance from FEMA.

In reliance on those misrepresentations, FEMA sent four United States Treasury checks made payable to WILLIAMS for "disaster assistance." Those checks were in the amounts of \$10,500, \$2,358, and \$2,000 (two checks). WILLIAMS cashed those four checks despite the fact that he has lived in Florida his whole life and that he was not eligible for any "disaster assistance" for Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita.

In addition to obtaining FEMA checks in his own name, WILLIAMS conspired with other individuals to obtain checks for them. In total, WILLIAMS was involved in the theft of \$41,216 from FEMA. That amount consists of \$16,858 in FEMA funds that WILLIAMS applied for in his own name and \$24,358 in FEMA funds that WILLIAMS obtained for other individuals.

WILLIAMS is one of twenty-six individuals who were charged in Operation “Storm Chaser” that was aimed at detecting and prosecuting instances of fraud in Central Florida related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. To date, twenty-five of those defendants have been sentenced. Twelve, including WILLIAMS, have been sentenced to prison terms. Thirteen individuals were sentenced to probation. All twenty-five individuals have been ordered to re-pay the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the amounts that they stole.

These cases were investigated by the United States Secret Service, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, with assistance from the U.S. Marshals Service. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg.

These cases are part of the effort by the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force to prosecute disaster-related crimes from last year’s hurricanes. The Task Force was created in September 2005 by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, investigate, and prosecute federal crimes arising from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, includes members of the Secret Service, the Postal Inspector’s Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.